

One *moai*'s trip to New York City: the amazing story behind the stunning photographs of a Tongariki *moai* in New York City in 1968

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Several years ago, when sorting boxes of Rapa Nui related materials left by my parents, I came across four large-scale photographs of a *moai* in New York City. My father, Bill Mulloy, was there watching as the head of one of Tongariki's impressive *moai* arrived on a flatbed truck and was carefully raised by a huge crane to sit on top of a pedestal in front of the Seagram Building on Park Avenue (Figure 1). The steel pedestal replicated the original height (eighteen feet) of the *moai* in relationship to the crowd of citizens who watched, captivated, as the visiting *moai* became part of the New York City skyline.

Piecing together the why and how of the unusual event recorded in these intriguing photographs has led me to a very interesting story, not just about one *moai*'s trip to New York, but about how decades of archaeological work on Rapa Nui was paid for by donations from private individuals who got out their personal check books and wrote checks to The International Fund for Monuments Easter Island Committee. Why? They had seen the Tongariki *moai* in New York City, maybe years ago, and the *moai* had captured their imagination and inspired them to take action to benefit Rapa Nui.



Figure 1. Bill Mulloy overseeing The Tongariki *moai*'s arrival on Park Avenue. (Photograph courtesy of Mulloy Photo Archives, George Holton Photographer).

The Tongariki *moai*'s presence on New York City's Park Avenue in the month of October 1968 brought to the world's attention the urgent need for conservation of Rapa Nui's endangered sacred sites. The International Fund for Monuments (IFM) Easter Island Committee's fundraising did secure support to finance the most prolific decade of archaeological work ever undertaken on Rapa Nui. This *moai* was working, in a creative way, half way around the world, exactly as the ancient Rapanui builders had intended. He served as a repository of ancient Rapa Nui *mana* and he reflected that powerful *mana* into a new community for the benefit of living Rapanui people back home.

The Tongariki *moai* and many smart, dedicated, creative, and generous people came to together to make this moment possible. They included James A. Gray (founder of the International Fund for Monuments), Bill Mulloy (preeminent Rapa Nui archaeologist) and Father Sebastián Englert (beloved Catholic priest and scholar of Rapa Nui language and history). They and a multitude of others came together to pull off the unlikely plan of taking a Rapa Nui *moai* on a fundraising and educational trip to New York City in 1968.

James A. Gray (Figure 2) was a retired US Army Colonel who devoted his retirement years to his passion of saving endangered architectural and archaeological treasures around the world. He had retired to Italy where, after leaving the army, he pursued his goals by putting together his engineering background and his international diplomatic skills. His first project was a proposal to stabilize Italy's leaning Tower of Pisa. Gray created the International Fund for Monuments in 1965 when he saw the need for a private funding organization to support monument preservation around the world. Gray was a dedicated, get-the-job done kind of man, gregarious and persuasive. He impressed people with his integrity. He had a talent for putting deserving projects together with wealthy donors who



Figure 2. Colonel James Gray greets the Tongariki *moai* when he arrives in the U.S. (Photograph courtesy of World Monuments Fund).

were assured that their money would go directly to the preservation projects of their choice. Gray never took any salary himself but lived off his army retirement and worked tirelessly out of an austere office in New York.

A very early project of the IFM was a UNESCO mission to rescue 12th century rock-hewn churches in Lalibela, Ethiopia. It was there that Gray met Edward Korry, a US diplomat who was later to become the US Ambassador to Chile. It was Ed Korry who invited James Gray to Chile where he met Bill Mulloy and Father Sebastián Englert. Bill Mulloy was just beginning the restoration of the ceremonial center of Tahai with Gonzalo Figueroa at that point in time; a patchwork of small donations from the Government of Chile and the University of Wyoming funded their work.

Gray and Mulloy recognized in each other a common drive, focus, and motivation that began a collaboration that was to last the rest of Bill Mulloy's life. Mulloy and his Chilean colleague Gonzalo Figueroa had just completed a report for UNESCO, *The Archeological Heritage of Rapa Nui*, which outlined a detailed long-term plan for restoration and preservation on Rapa Nui. Gray recognized in this document a truly important conservation project that the International Fund for Monuments could financially support. The first airplanes with international tour groups had started to arrive on Rapa Nui in 1966 and it was obvious that the fragile archeological sites were endangered and that protection as well as restoration was imperative.

Colonel Gray quickly put together The Easter Island Committee with Father Sebastián Englert as the chairman and Thor Heyerdahl as the Honorary Chairman and began fundraising. Gray had already developed an impressive network of wealthy people who were interested in antiquities and were willing to put their money to work preserving them. A single substantial donation to IFM jumpstarted the next six months of Mulloy's Rapa Nui fieldwork. Later IFM's private donations paid half of Mulloy's teaching salary at the University of Wyoming so he could spend six months of every year focusing on his Rapa Nui projects.

This additional funding allowed Mulloy to expand his crew for the 1968 field season to include Bill Ayres and Pat McCoy, both graduate students in archaeology, as well as Herb Pownall, a photographer from the University of Wyoming, who brought along his 16-year-old son Paul. They were able to substantially increase the number of Rapanui workers that were employed, including Rafael Rapu, who was trained as a photographer, and Uka Tepano, who was their cultural consultant. This team was brought together to finish the investigation and restoration of the critically endangered coastal sites around Tahai, to begin the restoration of the ceremonial village of 'Orongo, and to start the important island-wide survey of archeological

sites. The plan was to implement Mulloy and Figueroa's recommendations as outlined in the UNESCO report.

When James Gray visited Rapa Nui in 1968 to see how the archaeological work was going, he and Bill Mulloy came up with the idea of taking a *moai* from Rapa Nui for a temporary visit to the US. The plan was to display the *moai* in various cities to bring international attention to the need for preservation and restoration of Rapa Nui's archaeological treasures and to solicit donations to the IFM for this important work. The original idea was to have Mulloy and Father Englert accompany the *moai* to various locations and give lectures that would educate people about Rapa Nui. They also wanted to make life-size replicas of the *moai* that would be sold as part of the fundraising efforts.

Gray was able to obtain permission to remove a *moai* from Rapa Nui because of his friendship with the US ambassador in Chile and through him had a direct connection to President Frei of Chile. The Chilean President wrote a decree allowing the International Fund for Monuments the short-term loan of a *moai*. After obtaining this permission, Gray flew back to Rapa Nui where he and Mulloy selected a statue. The head of a *moai* from Tongariki was chosen because of its size, aesthetic beauty, and the fact that it had already been moved from its original location by the tidal wave in 1960. The *moai* head weighed about 5 tons and was 8 feet tall. This was the head broken from a huge statue that originally weighed 40-50 tons and was 18 feet tall. In ancient times, it stood on the *ahu* platform at Tongariki with fourteen other *moai*.

A wooden sledge was built so the *moai* head could be protected while it was taken from Tongariki to the airfield on Rapa Nui. At that time there was a small US Air Force base with a satellite tracking station on Rapa Nui. The airstrip had been expanded to accommodate Hercules airplanes; their large cargo space was estimated to be able to carry the 5-ton *moai*. Gray discussed the situation with the local air force commander and then returned to Chile. The US ambassador to Chile contacted the commanding General of the US Air Force and asked for their assistance in transporting the *moai* from Rapa Nui to Santiago, Chile. Gray planned to have the *moai* shipped by boat from Chile to New York and had a donor already lined up to cover those expenses. Upon returning to the US, Gray was informed that "if the matter was given no publicity" the US Air Force would fly the *moai* to Santiago where the IFM would assume responsibility for transporting it on to the US. A week later, Gray received a phone call saying that "his *moai*" was available to be picked up at McGuire Air Force base in New Jersey. Much to Gray's surprise and delight the US Air Force plane had flown the Tongariki *moai* directly to the US from Rapa Nui!

On October 21, 1968 the Tongariki *moai* was placed on a 12-foot high pedestal in front of the Seagram Building, 375 Park Avenue in New York City (Figures 3 and 4). The pedestal was designed to replicate the height of the actual statue, creating a similar relationship between the human viewer and the *moai* as it once stood on its *ahu* platform on Rapa Nui. The photographs taken that day give a small idea of



Figure 3. *Moai* raising in the Plaza of the Seagram Building. (Photograph courtesy of Mulloy Photo Archives, Cyril Morris Photographer).



Figure 4. The Tongariki *moai* stands 18 feet tall, as with his torso on his *ahu* on Park Avenue, NYC. (Photograph courtesy of World Monuments Fund).



Figure 5. The Tongariki *moai* becomes part of the New York City Skyline. (Photograph courtesy of Mulloy Photo Archives, George Holton Photographer).

how impressive that event must have been. A crowd of about 300 people gathered to watch as a huge crane carefully raised, then lowered the 5-ton head onto its temporary resting place. It took several hours for the process to be completed, leaving those who were working and watching with a healthy respect for the ancient Rapa Nui people who carved, transported, and erected hundreds of *moai* without the aid of a crane.

After the *moai* was safely in place, the crowd moved inside to a reception with speeches and drinks (I can only assume they served Seagram's 7, rather than the more appropriate Pisco Sours). In the lobby, there was an educational exhibit about Rapa Nui, with artifacts borrowed from the collections of Harvard's Peabody Museum, The American Museum of Natural History, and the Museum of Primitive Art, all arranged by Samuel Adams Green, Special Projects Director of the International Fund for Monuments. At the reception, William Mulloy spoke passionately about Rapa Nui and was quoted as saying "Easter Island violates some of the most basic rules of cultural history. In this isolated spot, culture developed that was almost on the verge of civilization. The why of this is the most important thing we can learn from the island."

The *ahu moai* sites of Rapa Nui were endangered by neglect and development and Mulloy wanted to draw international attention to this situation and encourage financial support for IFM's ongoing efforts to protect and restore them.

The Tongariki *moai*'s arrival on Park Avenue was widely covered by the press. He appeared on the front page of the New York Times on October 22, 1968 and articles about the Tongariki *moai* appeared in over 300 publications around the world. It was estimated that over 30 million people were exposed to the story in the US alone. The *moai* of Rapa Nui was on its way to becoming one of the most recognized iconic images in the world.

Initially the results of this fundraising effort couldn't be counted as an overwhelming success. Only \$2,200 was actually collected by the IFM immediately after the Tongariki *moai*'s New York visit, however the long term consequences to International Fund for Monuments Easter Island Committee have been substantial. Over the years many of the donors to the IFM's Easter Island Committee projects reported that seeing the *moai* in NYC was what raised their interest and awareness of the need for conservation and

restoration of sites on Rapa Nui. Twenty-five years after seeing the Tongariki *moai* in New York City a wealthy doctor from New Jersey donated half a million dollars expressly earmarked for Rapa Nui.

From October 21 to November 21, 1968 the Tongariki *moai* stood in the Seagram Building's Plaza overlooking one of the most famous streets in New York (Figure 5). He was seen by thousands of people every day. At the end of November he was moved to Washington DC to be displayed outside of the Pan American Union Building during the Organization of American States' Easter Island Exhibit. In January of 1969 the *moai* was back in New York with Margaret Mead and Harry Shapiro for The American Museum of Natural History's opening of the new Peoples of the Pacific Hall. Before his return to Rapa Nui, the Tongariki *moai* also briefly visited the campus of Temple University in Philadelphia.

Father Sebastián Englert, beloved priest to the Rapanui population and the Chairman of the Easter Island Committee of the International Fund for Monuments, was not present for the installation of the *moai* in NYC. He arrived to begin a lecture series in Washington DC in December for the inauguration of the Easter Island Exhibit at the Organization of American States. One of the last photographs taken of Father Sebastián before his death was with the Tongariki *moai* in Washington, DC (Figure 6). Father Sebastián then traveled to New Orleans where he became ill while staying with friends and died in the hospital there on January 8, 1969. The 80-year-old priest had lived the last 35 years of his life on Rapa Nui and was a respected scholar of Rapanui language and culture. Englert authored the first Rapanui language dictionary

and *La Tierra de Hotu Matu'a*, a detailed survey of the language, ethnology, and archaeology of the island. His death was a tragic loss to the people of Rapa Nui and the community of Pacific scholars.

According to the agreement made with the Chilean Government, the International Fund for Monuments had permission to make a cast of the Tongariki *moai* and produce up to 100 replicas to be sold as part of their fundraising efforts (Figure 7). It was hoped that the sale of these replicas would provide funding for future archaeology work. The first replica was sent to Osaka Japan for display at the Chile Pavilion of EXPO 70. Ten concrete copies of the Tongariki *moai* were eventually made and sold. What the selling price was and how many were actually sold, rather than donated to museums, is unknown as well as the current location of the original mold. There are *moai* replicas at the Smithsonian Institution, the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History, Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, New York, and the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. Two other *moai* replicas are in Japan, one is in Montreal, Canada, and the others are owned by private individuals in unknown locations.

After less than a year away from home, the Tongariki *moai*, according to the agreement with the president of Chile, was returned safely to Rapa Nui. When the ceremonial center of Tongariki was reconstructed, many years later, the traveling *moai* was reconnected to his body and re-erected on the *ahu* platform along with the fourteen other Tongariki *moai*. When you view this spectacular site, Tongariki's traveling *moai* is second from the left.

Colonel Gray's International Fund for Monuments went on to fund all the archaeological projects under

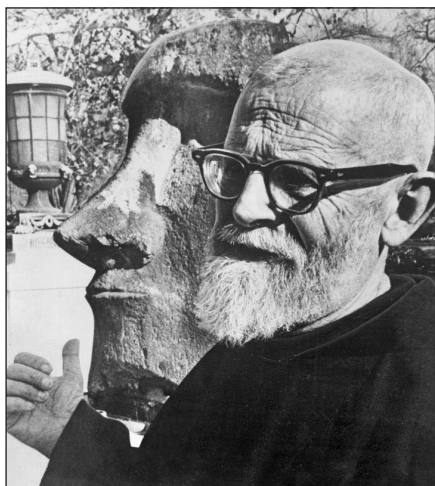


Figure 6. Father Sebastián Englert with the Tongariki *moai*, Washington DC, Dec. 1968. Photograph courtesy of Mulloy Photo Archives).



Figure 7. One of ten concrete reproductions made of the Tongariki *moai*. (Photograph courtesy of World Monuments Fund).

the direction of Bill Mulloy from 1968 to 1978. In a fundraising pamphlet soliciting private donations for the IFM, Bill Mulloy is quoted as estimating that the Rapa Nui archaeological program would cost \$150,000 per year and that the cost of raising a single *moai* was \$1,000 to \$5,000, while it cost \$20,000 to restore an *ahu* platform. The contributions of International Fund for Monuments to Rapa Nui-related projects have been substantial and far reaching. In fact, it is likely that the International Fund for Monuments contributed more financial support to Rapa Nui archaeological restorations than any other organization ever. IFM worked closely with the Government of Chile, University of Wyoming, and LAN Chile Airlines. Each of these agencies provided goods, services, and personnel to achieve their mutual goal of restoring and preserving Rapa Nui's archaeological heritage.

An additional important contribution of the International Fund for Monuments was the publication of a series of bulletins chronicling Bill Mulloy's restoration work on Rapa Nui. These publications were prepared as preliminary reports and lack much of the detailed analysis of a full site report. However, because of Bill Mulloy's untimely death, before he was able to write a comprehensive record of his significant body of knowledge about Rapa Nui, these publications have become uniquely important. A fifth and final IFM Bulletin, *Easter Island Settlement Patterns*, by Patrick C. McCoy, was published in 1976.

I remember meeting James Gray only once in March of 1978 when he flew all the way from New York to Laramie, Wyoming to see my father, Bill Mulloy. Although I did not know him at all or understand the importance of what he was doing for Rapa Nui, I was impressed by the fact that he would make such a long trip to spend less than an hour talking. Bill was already in the hospital and gravely ill with lung cancer. He had exhausted all of his remaining energy making a trip with my mother, Emily, for one last visit to his beloved Rapa Nui. He went to say good-bye to his many dear friends and tried to reassure himself that his Rapa Nui projects would continue. The discussion he had with James Gray related to the IFM's continued support and the direction of their future projects. My father

recommended a change of focus and priority from restoration of *ahu* sites to finishing the archaeological survey and conservation efforts. He also recommended that his dear friend and long time collaborator Gonzalo Figueroa should assume leadership of the Rapa Nui field projects.

The International Fund for Monuments became the World Monuments Fund in 1985 and is still the world's leader in private funding of preservation and conservation of monuments. The World Monuments Fund has continued to be a major contributor to Rapa Nui's preservation and conservation projects into the current era. For example, the new Visitors Center at 'Orongo, completed in 2012, received substantial funding from the World Monuments Fund, which has also contributed to innumerable Rapa Nui preservation and educational projects over the years.

Back in 1968 when Bill Mulloy, Father Sebastián and IFM's Colonel Gray came up with the idea of taking a *moai* to New York City on a fundraising trip, they had a dream; a dream of Rapa Nui with its unique cultural heritage preserved and protected. This was a dream of an outdoor museum where the grandeur of the ancient Rapa Nui culture could be experienced by visitors from all over the world. I believe that their dream has manifested and that they would be very pleased with the continuing development of their vision. There now is a Rapa Nui National Park to shelter and protect the antiquities, and there are *moai* standing again on restored *ahu* platforms around the island. The *moai* are back on the job, reflecting their ancient *mana* outward for the benefit of the living Rapa Nui community. The Tongariki traveling *moai* is smiling from his magnificent *ahu* because his trip to New York made a significant contribution to manifesting the dream of Rapa Nui's rebirth.

Sources and Acknowledgments

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Mulloy family photo archives

Margot Note, Archivist, World Monuments Fund